

E-Mail sent to the House Appropriations Committee via committee staff - - Received 4/5/2011 at 5:30 pm

Attached please find a copy of my testimony and supporting document for tomorrow morning hearing in House Appropriations Committee. I regret that I will be unable to attend. Thank you for distributing my testimony to committee members and the committee secretary.

Derek Goldman, Field Representative  
***Western Wolf Coalition***

April 5, 2011

Dear Chairman McNutt and members of Montana's House Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to urge you to oppose **SB 414** in committee this Wednesday.

The courts and Congress are about to delist wolves in Montana and Idaho, and both effort are contingent on the fact the Montana already has a management plan that has been approved by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. **Senator Vincent's bill would undermine Montana's federally-approved wolf management plan and thereby jeopardize the best chance Montana has for state control over wolves.**

SB 414 would allow wolves to be killed on private land at any time without a license, once wolves have been delisted. This essentially creates a system of dual classification of wolves in Montana, whereby wolves are managed as a game animal on public land, but treated as a predator animal on private land, with unregulated, unlicensed killing. Wyoming has already gone down a similar management path, and it has gotten them nowhere, while holding up delisting here in Montana.

SB 414 also violates, in letter and in spirit, the central tenets of the much-heralded, sportsman's North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that requires:

- Equal hunting opportunity for all, regardless of land ownership;
- Well-regulated, licensed hunting with seasons, harvest limits and penalties;
- The use of science and monitoring to ensure wildlife resources are held in the public trust for future generations.

As such, no ethical sportsman would support SB 414.

Clearly, wolves are becoming everyone's favorite scapegoat this session. Wild accusations of the "decimation" of elk herds are just that. In fact, with the exception of a few herds, elk are doing quite well. Statewide elk population numbers are UP 60 percent since wolves were reintroduced in 1995, according to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Furthermore, according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks most recent elk counts, 80 percent of hunting districts in Montana (and even 76 percent of those districts in wolf country) are at or above population objective. And hunter success is as high as ever. (Please see the attached fact sheet on elk & wolves for more cited data on that.)

And yes, wolves occasionally snack on livestock, but livestock loss to wolves is a small fraction of livestock loss overall—domestic dogs, disease and winter storms kill many times more livestock than wolves do.

Montana's wolf management plan was put together thoughtfully, and after much citizen input from all stakeholders. It has already received USFWS approval, and has been held up as a model for other states. For years, Wyoming has been holding up the show on wolf delisting—Montana should not join our southern neighbors, but by gutting Montana's wolf management plan, but that's exactly the path that SB 414 would send us down.

The return of the gray wolf to the Northern Rockies is a remarkable achievement in wildlife restoration and an Endangered Species Act success story. I want to see Montana succeed at managing wolves in way that preserves this piece of our unique wildlife heritage for future generations. Upholding Montana's wolf management plan is central to that effort, so please oppose SB 414.

I apologize that I am unable to attend the hearing in person, but please let me know if I can supply any other information that might be helpful to the committee.

Respectfully,

Derek Goldman, Field Representative  
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# ELK HUNTING IN WOLF COUNTRY: THE FACTS



## **Wolves and elk numbers: what's the real deal?**

Some hunters in the Northern Rockies have reported that it is harder to find elk since wolves have returned to the region, but this is not because there are fewer elk. For example, Montana's elk herd has grown from 55,000 in 1978 to 150,000 today. Rather, as documented by researchers and experienced by sportsmen, wolves cause elk to change their behavior on the landscape. Since the return of wolves to the West, elk tend to linger less in open areas, often move to higher altitudes, and may even leave one valley to seek out more hidden locales in a nearby valley.

While changes in elk behavior may create a more-challenging hunting experience (for wolves as well as people!), elk populations throughout the region remain high. Yes, in a few herds in the N. Rockies, wolves may be one factor contributing to declining elk populations, but wildlife agencies in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho report that overall elk populations are either at, or above, statewide population objectives.

## **Wolves and hunter harvest**

Although widely assumed that wolves decrease hunting success, hunter harvest of elk in the N. Rockies continues to be good in all three states. In Wyoming, hunters had another good year in 2009, leading the region with a 43% success rate. Montana and Idaho hunter success is 22% and 20% respectively.<sup>3</sup>

All 3 states acknowledge that a primary reason for locally overabundant elk populations is that elk are able to find refuge from hunters on privately owned lands closed to public access. Although this has been little documented, it is possible that wolves may reduce such over-concentrations by hazing the animals from private land into areas where they can be publicly hunted.

### **Elk Populations by State**

#### **Wyoming<sup>1</sup>**

- 120,00 elk estimated statewide, 50 percent above objective
- The state of Wyoming continues to manage for a reduction in elk population

#### **Montana<sup>2</sup>**

- 150,00 elk estimated statewide, 14 percent over objective
- Montana has the second highest elk population of any state

#### **Idaho**

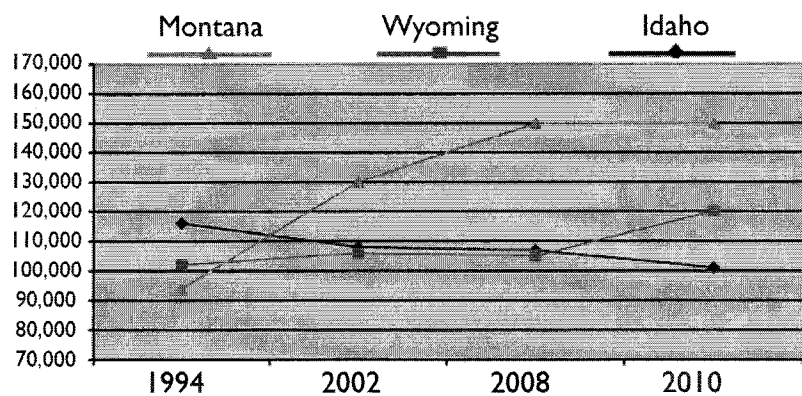
- Estimated population: 101,100, slightly below objective<sup>3</sup>
- 23 of the state's 29 management zones have elk numbers within targets or above<sup>4</sup>

## More interesting wolf-ungulate facts

- Wolves help keep elk herds strong and healthy by preying preferentially upon the most vulnerable, sick or old animals<sup>5</sup>.
- Antelope fawns are a primary prey of coyotes in many areas. A recent study, published in the scientific journal *Ecology*<sup>6</sup>, indicates that wolves have actually increased survival rates of antelope fawns in Wyoming by lowering coyote numbers.
- In years past, state wildlife agencies have frequently issued surplus elk tags and season extensions to reduce elk numbers. This is especially true for the N. Yellowstone elk herd, where wolves have often been blamed for a drop in herd numbers.



### Northern Rockies Elk Populations 1994-2010



## The future of elk in the Northern Rockies

The biggest threat to elk in the N. Rockies is not the wolf, but rather the loss of habitat due to residential and industrial development. Development not only displaces elk into an ever-shrinking range of quality habitat, but also results in the loss of sportsmen access to traditional hunting grounds. For this reason, preserving as much of our wildlands as possible for elk and all wildlife is crucial, and will require a sustained, cooperative effort by conservationists, sportsmen and wildlife lovers.

### Endnotes

- 1 Wyoming Game and Fish
- 2 Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- 3 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation 2010 elk forecast
- 4 Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game
- 5 Lukens, Jim. "Eleven years with Wolves - What We've Learned," News release, Idaho Fish & Game Department, April 25, 2006.
- 6 Kim Murray Berger, Eric M. Gese, and Joel Berger. 2008. Indirect effects and traditional trophic cascades: a test involving wolves, coyotes, and pronghorn. *Ecology* 89: 818-828.